

REMARKS

Claims 1-4, 7-21, and 23-26 are currently pending. Claims 1-4 and 7-17 are allowed and claims 18-21 and 23-26 stand rejected.

At the outset, Applicants thank Examiner Comstock for extending the courtesy of a telephone interview to Applicants' undersigned attorney and Giordana Belenchia on April 3, 2008. During the interview, claims 18 and 21 were discussed and agreement was reached that the amendments made herein to claims 18 and 21 overcome U.S. Patent No. 5,676,666 of Oxland et. al.

In particular, claim 18 is amended to clarify that a cross member is adapted to removably connect first and second tissue retractor and guide devices, each of the first and second tissue retractor and guide devices having a guide member with first and second barrels. Oxland fails to teach two tissue retractor and guide devices connected by a cross member where each device has a guide member with first and second barrels. Claim 21 is amended to include the limitations of claim 23, which is cancelled, and to specify that the mating element is between the barrels and engages the spinal plate as Oxland fails to teach a guide member having a mating element located between first and second barrels that engages a spinal plate.

Accordingly, all claims are in condition for allowance and allowance thereof is respectfully requested. The Examiner is encouraged to telephone the undersigned attorney for Applicants if such communication is deemed to expedite prosecution of this application.

Respectfully submitted,

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